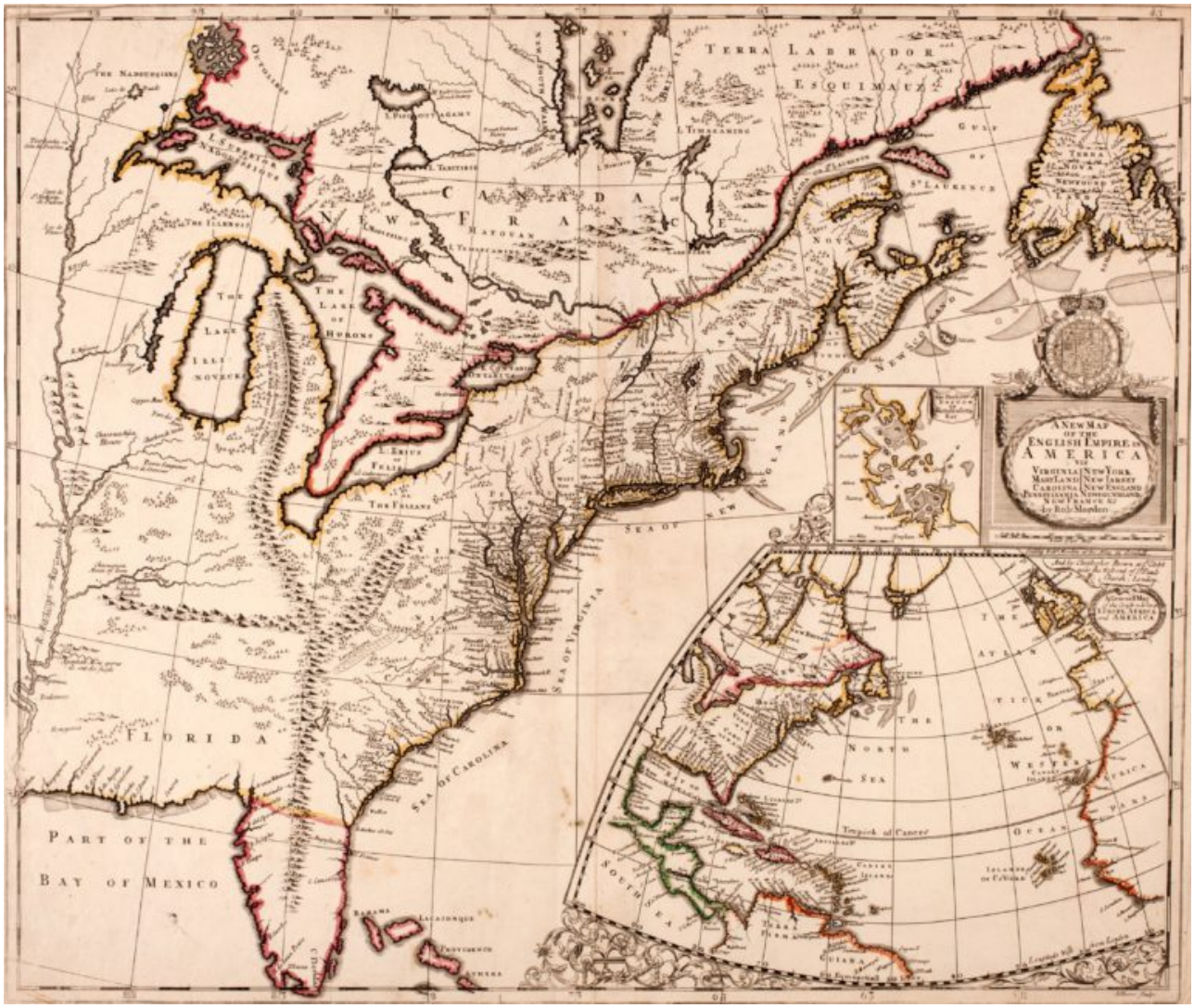
Cabin Fever in Frontier House

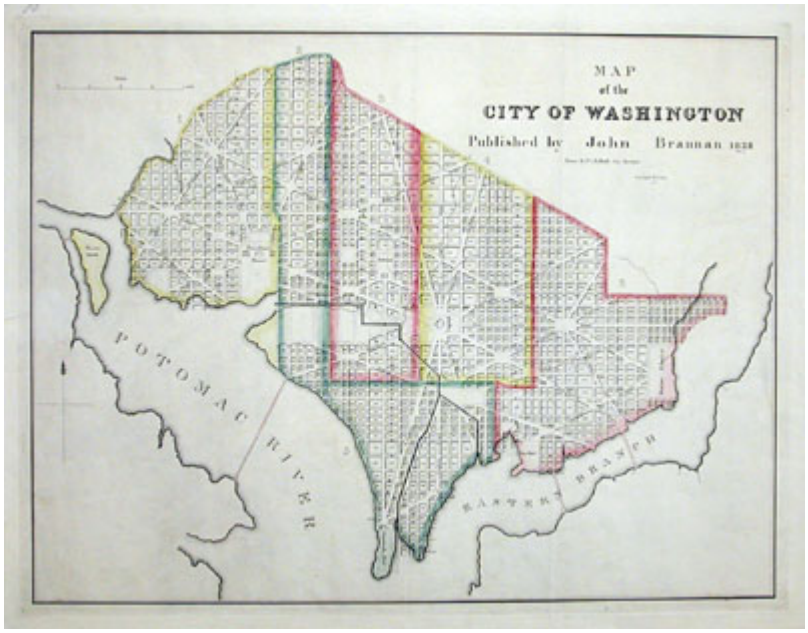
“Why this judgment about whether or not the participants really lived the life of 1883 homesteaders? Is the experiment a success if they feel as though they were homesteading or only if they convince the experts that they’d worked hard enough to survive the winter?”

Not-So-Distant Relations?



Common-place asks Victoria Freeman, author of Distant Relations: How My Ancestors Colonized North America (South Royalton, Vt., forthcoming November 2002), what kinds of responsibility do descendants of dispossessors have to history and to native peoples today?

National Domesticity in the Early Republic: Washington, D.C.



Presented as part of the special issue “Early Cities of the Americas.”

“The fact that everyone in the city helped to build or run the new government led to a new kind of domesticity that was literally shaped by national politics, although in ways L’Enfant and Washington could not have foreseen.”

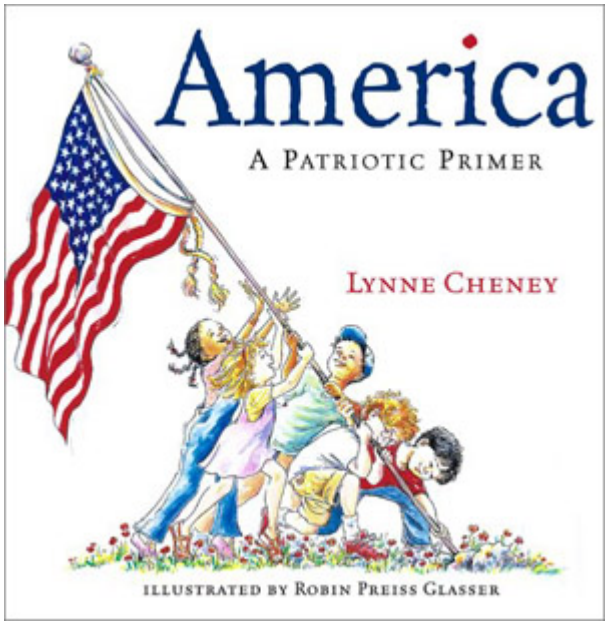
No More Kings

“Stanford historian Jack Rakove, who serves as consultant, confesses, ‘If you ask from a historian’s vantage point, how does this correspond to contemporary scholarship? Well, probably, not that well. But if you ask, what is it that students of this age ought to be introduced to so that they have a rough idea of the Revolution, it’s actually pretty good.”

Dancing across the Color Line

"'And in what walk of life, or dance of life does man ever get such stimulating applause as thunders about him, when, having danced his partner off her feet, and himself too, he finishes by leaping gloriously on the bar-counter, and calling for something to drink, with the chuckle of a million of counterfeit Jim Crows, in one inimitable sound!'"

The Sandbox of Iwo Jima



My two little boys love the kids' sections of megabookstores, so a trip to Borders to get out of the heat seemed in order during our annual Fourth of July visit to their grandparents. Naturally there was a table full of patriotic books for children, and what should there be in the middle of the display but the latest opus by our Second Lady and longtime professional culture warrior, Lynne Cheney. It's called *America: A Patriotic Primer* (New York, 2001), and it signals its intentions with its cover art: a rainbow coalition of kids hoisting a flag in the style of the Iwo Jima monument. What Cheney offers up here is good old-fashioned Cold War mythology repackaged for today's youth.

Lynne Cheney, *An American Primer*

One's expectations cannot help but be low. The author, after all, is a woman who has made a career out of savaging some of America's most vulnerable institutions—from the NEH to public universities—for cheap political points. Her response to 9/11 was to whip up hatred of pinko professors by sponsoring a collection of rhetoric bites (under the title, *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America*) purporting to show that higher education hated America because some teachers and students actually exercised the rights we are defending and did something other than sing hosannas to El Presidente. The basic procedure was to set poll results and quotations showing the monolithically ecstatic response to the war on terrorism from all other quarters—"Fifty Million George W. Bush Fans Can't Be Wrong!"—against critical but often not especially incendiary remarks coming out of college classrooms

and teach-ins. As she has in the past, Cheney was waging war on the very thing that makes academia most valuable to our society: its ability to provide dissenting or speculative voices at the times when they are most needed. But so what? Lynne Cheney was only following the Dick Cheney administration playbook in using one of the worst tragedies in American history to advance her preexisting agenda.

Not content simply to target universities, though, *Defending Civilization* also signaled Cheney's intention to go after our kids—and our history: "At a time of national crisis . . . [o]ur children and grandchildren—indeed, all of us—need to know the ideas and ideals on which our nation has been built. We need to understand how fortunate we are to live in freedom." Fine sentiments on their face, if Cheney had any respect for histories that told of times when the U.S. had to be forced to live up to its own values or even change them.

What version of American history does Cheney serve up with her ABC's? As the Cheney *oeuvre* goes, the *Patriotic Primer* is a fair-minded and moderate production. A bland Bushian multiculturalism is in evidence throughout—indeed, the same tokenistic kind displayed by culture-war bêtes noire such as mainstream television and children's books. If nobody has two mommies, wheelchairs in crowd scenes and black female judges are featured, and nary a glowering white Dick Cheneyesque visage can be found. The letter "R" doesn't stand for Franklin Roosevelt, but it doesn't go to Ronald Reagan either. (In fact, Ronnie is only mentioned once as far as I can see, though he does get the last word.)

Of course, mindless patriotism and hero worship abound: "A is for America, the land that we love," "B is for the Birthday of this nation of ours," "F is for Freedom and the Flag that we fly," "H is for Heroes," "P is for Patriotism that fills our hearts with pride," "Q is for America's Quest for the new, the far, and the very best," "V is for Valor." J, L, M, and W go to the appropriate presidents, and great leaders are emphasized throughout.

On the other hand, various American values that the current administration does not seem to have uppermost in mind also get letters, including Constitution, Rights, Equality, and Tolerance. There is even the occasional flicker of unintentional humor, such as the moment in Cheney's introduction where she paints a picture of herself and her husband home-schooling the grandkids, presumably at an undisclosed, secure location: "I want my granddaughters . . . to love this country. Their parents want this for them too, and so what they do, and what the Vice President and I do, is teach them about the United States, about its geography and its people and its history." I would definitely pay to see Dick Cheney snarling his way through George Washington and the cherry tree. Or maybe in Dick's version, Washington's dad would congratulate him for having the courage to consume a natural resource?

In sum, the reactionary message of the *Patriotic Primer* is much subtler than it might have been. But it is still there, both in things left out and in those

misplaced. K does go to Martin Luther King Jr., and S does go to women's suffrage. Beyond that, there is almost nothing here to suggest to children that American citizens themselves have or should play much of a role in protecting Freedom other than chanting the alphabet, waving the flag, and serving in the military. D is not for democracy. And though I is for Ideals, most of the pictures evoke great men and militarism: Mount Rushmore, the Alamo, and the Tomb of the Unknowns. The most mischievous image in the "I" section is a little drawing of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, whose featureless black slabs were clearly designed to overwhelm the visitor with the horror of so many dying for so little. Indeed, that was why conservatives attacked the memorial when its design was first publicized.

Similarly, "C is for the Constitution" is illustrated not to evoke constitutional provisions or principles, but with pictures of the document's shrine in the National Archives and other Washington, D.C., monuments. In this way, the Constitution gets converted from a set of rules limiting government power to a sacred relic validating whatever "America" might decide to do.

Cheney has systematically avoided historical situations where fundamental criticisms of American society and government were made, or where mass movements or violence were involved in fighting some American evil. I is not for internment, nor is S for slavery or A for abolitionism. In fact, slavery appears only on the "L" page, where Lincoln is credited with the Emancipation Proclamation, and in a tiny "Equality Time Line" on the E-F pages that references the Thirteenth Amendment (though not the thornier Fourteenth). Significantly, the time line is literally engulfed by a wraparound feature on showing proper respect for the flag. "U" does not stand for unions, the existence of which children will never suspect after reading this book. I guess those presidents and corporate directors just woke up one morning and decided to shorten the working day and week on their own! Oh, and pay people enough to live in nice suburban houses and spend seventeen bucks on a children's book.

The *Patriotic Primer*'s overall philosophy is the soporific one that things have gotten progressively better over the centuries without ordinary Americans doing anything other than going to work, following orders, and rallying around their leaders. "Over the years, more and more of us have been able to enjoy these rights equally," explains Cheney on the "E is for Equality" page, dropping out the parts where her ideological forebears worked against the changes that made the happy multicultural scenes in her book possible. As long as we are good little boys and girls, and do what the authority figures say, she coos, we will all get just as much freedom as we deserve. OK, I agree with that part.

Nevertheless, our boys got a picture book on the Declaration of Independence instead; it actually explains what one of those holy relics says, and even touches on some of the evils from which the Founders wanted to be free. Look, guys, a funny cartoon on civilian control of the military! Of course, they were more interested in playing with the store's train set than in being propagandized by Thomas Jefferson, Lynne Cheney, or me.

Further Reading:

For additional, late-breaking comments on this and other historical-political topics, see "Publick Occurrences Extra."

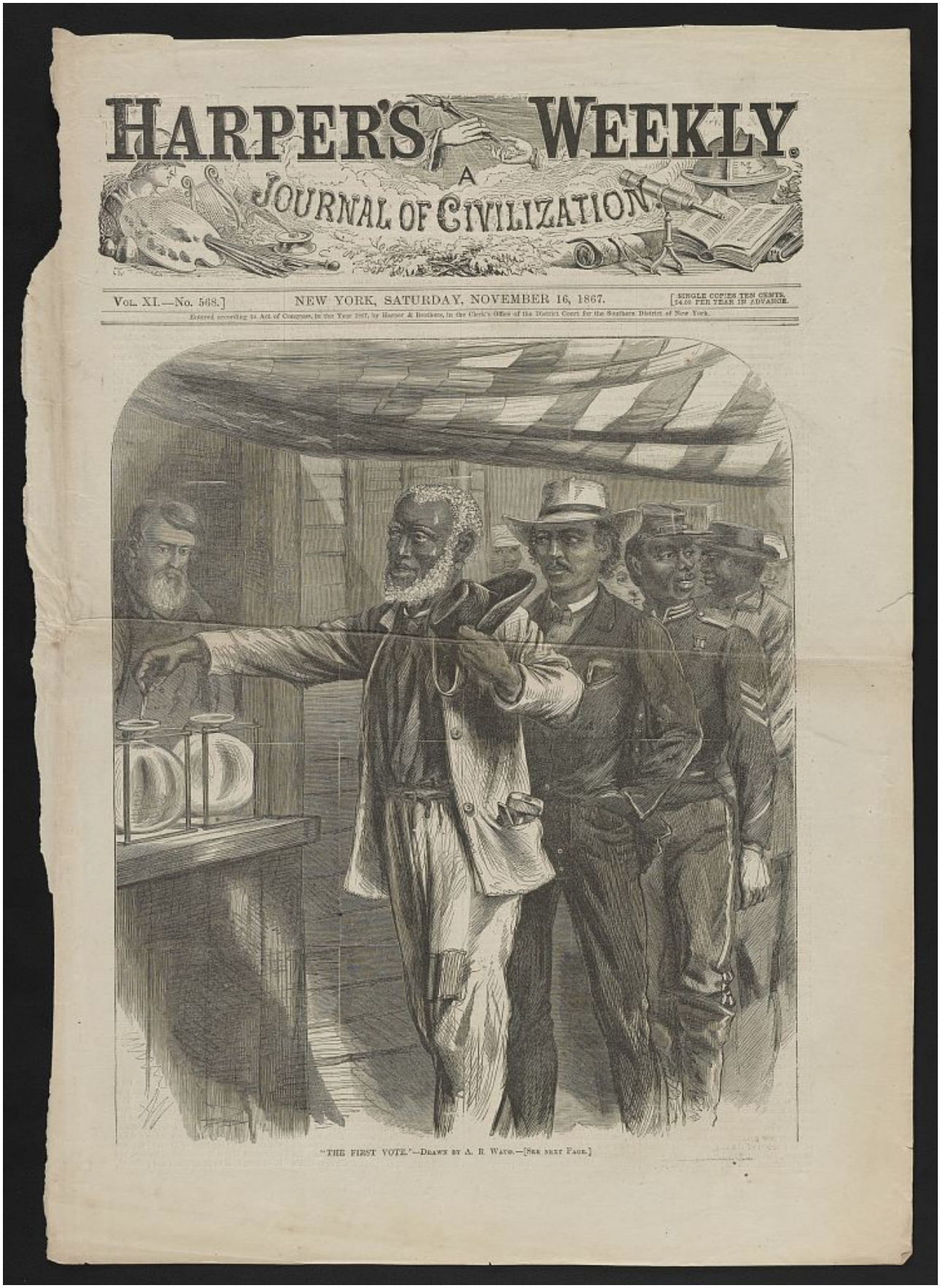
The book we bought is *The Declaration of Independence* by Sam Fink (New York, 2002), which I find cute, informative, and not remotely agenda driven. It breaks down the Declaration phrase by phrase, illustrating the meaning of each with a sometimes comically literal drawing. There is also a chronology of the Revolution up through July 1776 and a glossary of terms.

The origins of the Iwo Jima flag-raising image, and its cultural history as a commemorative motif, are analyzed by Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall in *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991). They described the book's culture-war tour of duty in a 1993 article. The controversy revolved around an exaggeration of their claim that the famous photograph captured a restaging of the flag raising done specifically for the cameras.

Lynne Cheney is hardly the only conservative to parlay cultural politics into children's merchandise. William Bennett has been hawking "Book of Virtues" products for years, including the original book and an animated television series that seems to be packaged for educational use. The culture war itself sometimes seems to be at least half a marketing pitch for "alternative" educational materials and entertainment, with the alleged demoralization wrought by public schooling and children's television standing in for halitosis as the invented social ill to be alleviated by the offered nostrum. No doubt years of conservative attacks on liberal bias at PBS had some influence on a Bennett-inspired show making the PBS schedule.

This article originally appeared in issue 2.4 (July, 2002).

The Politics Issue Cometh



Things have not been as active as they might have been around here because we are busy are completing what I think has turned out to be one of the biggest

projects in the history of *Common–Place*, the special Politics Issue. Some server problems have delayed the full release until early next week, so I thought I would offer a preview here on the blog, because the blog is going to be heavily involved. That's right: in addition to a very full slate of regular *Common-Place* articles, there will be ongoing, between-issue content, provided in many cases by writers other than myself. And there will be comment pages here for each article. Change you will believe in!

As to the aforementioned preview: you should see some links at the top of the sidebar on the right. These include a beta release (as we say here in the world of retro-high tech) of my introduction and the full edition of a special bonus article by University of New Mexico legal historian Christian G. Fritz, "America's Unknown Constitutional World." You should also see the comment page and an early snippet of Ray Raphael's "Instructions: The People's Voice in Revolutionary America." Together these two pieces form a mini-package on a topic I find myself increasingly absorbed by, popular constitutionalism.

Look for the rest of the Politics Issue very soon.

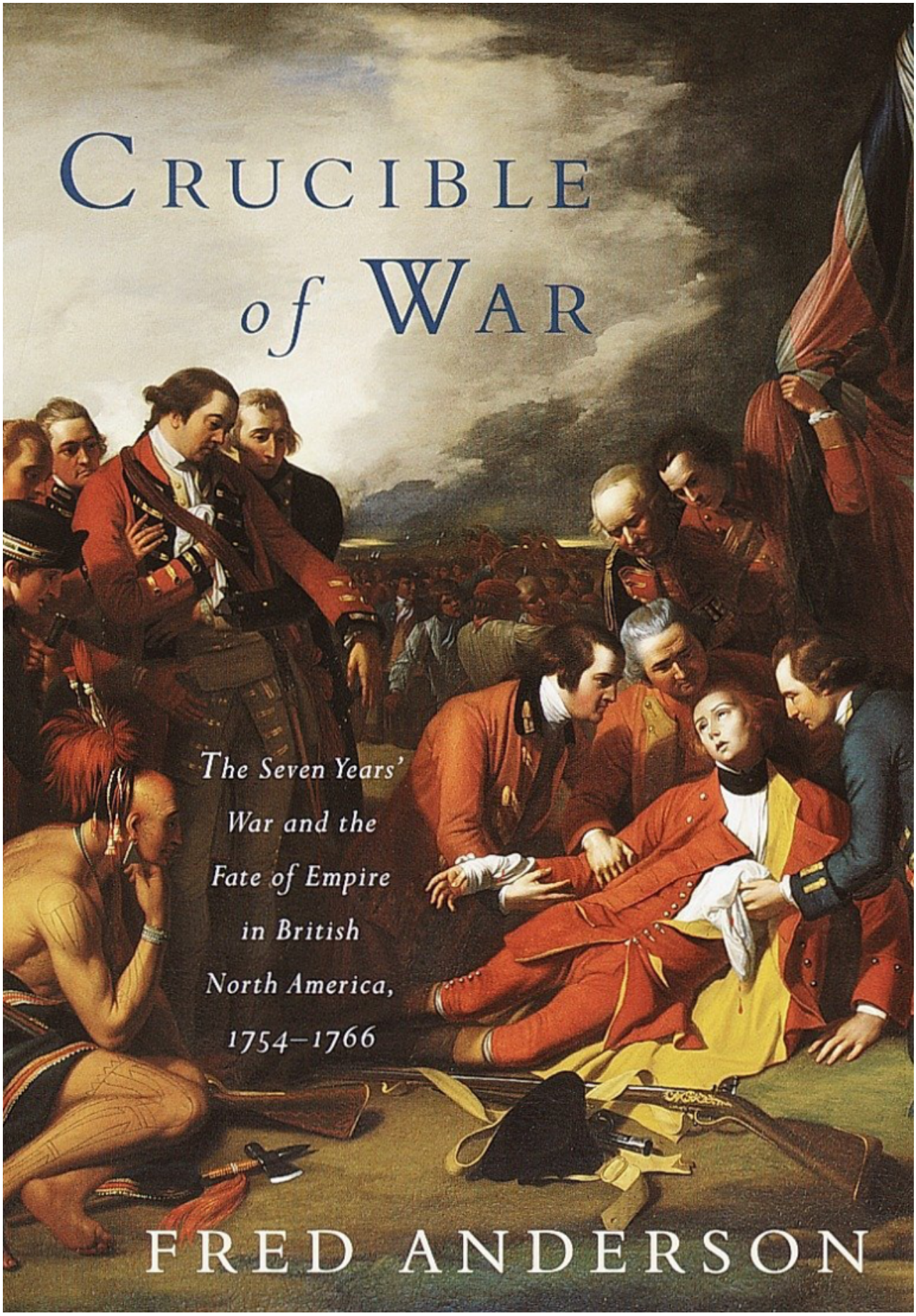
This article originally appeared in issue 9.1 (October, 2008).

Jeffrey L. Pasley is associate professor of history at the University of Missouri and the author of *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (2001), along with numerous articles and book chapters, most recently the entry on Philip Freneau in Greil Marcus's forthcoming New Literary History of America. He is currently completing a book on the presidential election of 1796 for the University Press of Kansas and also writes the blog Publick Occurrences 2.0 for some Website called *Common-place*.

Narrative Style and Indian Actors in the Seven Years' War

Crucible of War has nearly as much to teach about form and style as it does about the Seven Years' War.

Author's Response


CRUCIBLE
of WAR
The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766
FRED ANDERSON

of course, Crucible of War is both imperfect in form, and incomplete—with respect to the scholarship it seeks to synthesize, no less than to the immensity of the event it tries to capture.

Introduction: The Conception of a Conference

From May 30 to June 1, 2013, the David Library of the American Revolution, the McNeil Center for Early American Studies, the Museum of the American Revolution, and the American Philosophical Society held a major conference, "The American Revolution Reborn," at Benjamin Franklin Hall in Philadelphia. The conference attracted over 300 attendees and a veritable avalanche of social media coverage and discussion.

The success of the conference was beyond what we as organizers ever imagined.

HISTORY came to the conference and produced ten short videos for its Website. The University of Pennsylvania Press and the McNeil Center will publish an anthology of the essays. And, as you are about to read, *Common-place* is hosting an online symposium on the conference, which includes the essays written by our commentators and new video from HISTORY. Before you get to these essays and videos, however, we would like to take a moment to tell you about the conference's origins and its innovative design, something that we believe is distilled in the format in which we have decided to present these essays on *Common-place*.

Left to our own devices, neither one of us would ever have thought of helping to put together these essays or of organizing the conference from which they arise. All we ever meant to do was honor our friendship with Frank Fox.

> To galvanize new thinking about the Revolution, we had to have more than just fresh perspectives. We had to have an audience engaged enough to notice them.

Frank came into our lives relatively late in his. He'd been a musician and then, improbably, a publisher of textbooks. Hardly anyone gets rich blowing a horn, and he certainly didn't. But he had a good career selling books. And after he was done with that journey, he decided to embark on a new one. He would write books of his own. History books.

Frank began with his own family's past. But his genealogical pursuits soon led him to ask larger questions, questions about Pennsylvania's past and the country's founding. Soon, he was writing a brilliantly quirky book, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, on Northampton County, Pennsylvania, in the years of the American Revolution. Then he set his sights on a more formidable target: the financing of the fighting in revolutionary Pennsylvania more largely. He became so immersed in his projects that he moved from Boston to Philadelphia so he could be closer to the relevant archives and to the community of the McNeil Center.

As Frank plunged into the past, he became more involved in the profession, attending conferences and McNeil Center seminars, even writing pieces for scholarly journals. He was enthralled. And we grew ever more enthralled with him. We prized his comradeship. We thrilled to keep him company as he found a true calling in this third act of his life. But as time wore on, he became more and more aware that the scholarly world was paying less and less attention to the event that fired his passion and consumed his interest, the American Revolution. Convinced that he could not, himself, reverse this drift, he turned to us and offered a challenge: a start-up gift to organize a conference that would re-energize the study of the Revolution. We couldn't say no to him.

So we set about to create a conference that would renew a field that seemed to have grown stale and, at bottom, tired of itself. For decades, the interpretation of the Revolution had been losing its verve and, worse, its

center. Even among the diminishing number who continued to want to work in the era of Independence, many were taking up topics ever further from the political rebellion itself. As we began thinking about the conference, we were clear only that we meant to take up Frank's challenge to revivify the study of the Revolution.

As good academics, we began by assembling an advisory committee. At that point, one of us was just finishing his Ph.D., the other just turning emeritus. So we sought others from the rest of the career range, to maximize our access to fresh ideas across the scholarly generations. We asked six to join us: Kathleen DuVal, Woody Holton, Benjamin Irvin, Brendan McConville, Andrew O'Shaughnessy, and Rosemarie Zagarri. When we brought them together for the first time, we were relieved to find that they shared not only our conviction that the study of the Revolution had been too long in thrall to concepts and controversies now half a century old but also our hope that together we could design a conference that might create a new paradigm for the field.

We spent the better part of our first meeting with our advisory committee crystallizing four themes upon which to organize the conference. We wanted themes that could at once draw on emergent work in the existing scholarship and spur new approaches. We settled on violence, civil war, power, and religion. Then we put out a call for proposals and waited for those proposals to arrive. When they did, we were surprised to discover that we had remarkably few proposals on religion and several stronger ones that saw the Revolution and its legacies in an international context. We all agreed to abandon the sessions we'd envisioned on religion and to add sessions on global perspectives, though we all continue to believe—and the conversations at the conference supported our belief—that religion and the Revolution is a subject ripe for future study.

As much as we worried over the content of the conference, we worried every bit as much about its form. None of us relished the prospect of another meeting in which one perfectly fine historian after another read one perfectly fine paper after another, leaving scant time for comments and questions from the audience. To galvanize new thinking about the Revolution, we had to have more than just fresh perspectives. We had to have an audience engaged enough to notice them, an audience that was not drifting off as one recitation blurred into another, an audience that actually participated in the production of those fresh perspectives.

It took months to figure out that new format for an academic meeting. Rather than have presenters read or pre-circulate the extended essays that we would later edit for book publication, we would ask them to prepare before the conference a ten-page version of their work that would convey its argument and offer a fair flavor of its evidence. This condensed version would be posted on the conference Website, to be read ahead of time by those attending. All the papers together would require just 140 pages of reading. Presenters could then assume that the audience had done its homework and that they were free to do something other than summarize their longer papers at the conference itself. We

could then ask presenters to do whatever they did at the conference in no more than eight minutes. With three or four presentations in each paper session, there would be half an hour of presentations and a full hour for responses from the audience. No one would fall asleep.

Of course, you were not at the conference, and you are not now about to read those conference papers. No matter.

What you are about to read is what followed those paper panels. We decided that each theme should have a commentary session in which leading scholars would respond to the previous session, speak about the theme, or do whatever they thought most urgent to do. This, we hoped, would encourage the type of conversation that might spur even more scholarship. Indeed, these sessions proved dynamic and engaging, as we think you will soon see for yourselves. In preparing them for this special issue of *Common-place*, we have tried to recapture the spirit of passionate and even unruly exchange which characterized the conference.

The transformative terms of the paper sessions enabled us to reconceive the terms of the commentary sessions too. Just as the new format liberated our paper-presenters to presume on and depart from the papers they had posted on the Website, so it freed our commentators from the obligations of commentary on the papers they had nominally been assigned. Since those papers had already had an hour of audience response, we could invite the commentators—who also had just eight minutes each, so as to leave the preponderance of their sessions for audience response as well—to bypass the papers if they pleased and to offer their own largest thoughts on the theme at hand.

We felt free to allow our commentators such liberties because we'd chosen them for their flair for thinking large thoughts. We encouraged them to take such liberties because, in most cases, we'd chosen them because they hadn't thought their large thoughts about the Revolution before. They were historians of the era who had never written consequentially about the Revolution itself. Or historians of other periods and places. Or historians of the Revolution who were not American. Or scholars who were not historians. In short, we'd sought voices that hadn't been heard before, even by the speakers themselves. We wanted analyses that our commentators might be formulating for the first time, because no one had ever asked them what they thought before.

You will see at once that we have not rounded up the usual suspects. Our contributors come from Australia, China, and the U.K., from departments of art history and English as well as history. Very few of them are specialists in the American Revolution. The rest—even the ones among them who are historians based in the United States—are variously historians of England, of American religion, of international labor, and of the environment. You are about to find out what they said and what the audience thought.

We think you will find that they have dazzling and distinctive things to say,

things that they have rarely if ever said in public before. They are not at the pinnacles of their professions for nothing. If they do not concur in pointing toward a new paradigm—the fondest of our fantasies when we first conceived the conference—they do diverge in tantalizing ways.

We have also tried to convey the tone and feel of the conference in the way we present these essays to you. We wanted our meeting to be as much about conversation as it was about formal presentations. Digital technology now allows us to give the world a taste of the discussion that coursed through the conference and to engage with it remotely. Thanks to HISTORY, we have video of all the Friday and Saturday sessions. Thanks to Peter Kotowski, a graduate student at Loyola University Chicago, we have identified some of the most probing questions from the audience at the conference and included them as videos in each essay. We invite readers to read the essay, watch the video, and continue the discussion that began in Philadelphia in the open comment sections that follow each video.

We hope you see in this symposium what we do: a beginning of the renewal of the study of the American Revolution. We thank Frank Fox for his vision.

This article originally appeared in issue 14.3 (Spring, 2014).

Michael Zuckerman began teaching history at the University of Pennsylvania in 1965. Although he is now professor of history emeritus, he still teaches courses at Penn.

Patrick Spero is an assistant professor of History and Leadership Studies at Williams College. He co-organized “The American Revolution Reborn” with Michael Zuckerman.